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**OPERATOR OF LITTLE VILLAGE PHOTO SHOP – NUEVO FOTO MUNOZ – CHARGED
WITH PARTICIPATING IN FRAUDULENT IDENTIFICATION
DOCUMENT CONSPIRACY**

CHICAGO – The operator of a photo studio in Chicago's Little Village community was charged today with conspiracy to produce false identification documents and aiding and abetting, a month after the shop was searched by federal agents and nearly two dozen defendants were charged with participating in a bustling counterfeit identification document business that allegedly generated between approximately \$2 million and \$3 million a year. The new defendant, **Elias Munoz**, operates Nuevo Foto Munoz at 3105 West 26th St., in the Little Village Discount Mall, where customers and undercover agents allegedly obtained photos that were later affixed to bogus government-issued identification cards.

Munoz, 62, of Chicago, will have an initial court appearance at 9 a.m. Wednesday before U.S. Magistrate Judge Geraldine Soat Brown in U.S. District Court. He was charged in a criminal complaint filed today, announced Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, and Elissa A. Brown, Special Agent-in-Charge of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Office of Investigations in Chicago. The Chicago offices of the U.S. Secret Service, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation are also participating in the investigation.

The complaint against Munoz – part of *Operation Paper Tiger* – incorporates charges brought last month against 22 defendants accused of participating in a 3½-year conspiracy to illegally produce identification documents, authentication features and false identification documents. Thirteen of the 22 defendants have been arrested in Chicago since April 24, including Julio Leija-Sanchez, the alleged leader of the Chicago cell of a Mexican-based criminal organization.

Also on April 24, ICE and other federal agents executed search warrants at four locations including Nuevo Foto Munoz. According to the complaint filed today, among the items seized from inside the studio were:

- ▶ approximately 717 blank blue State of Illinois resident identification cards;
- ▶ approximately 228 blank red United States identification cards;
- ▶ approximately 900 blank green United States of America, Illinois resident identification cards, bearing a State of Illinois seal embossed in the background of the identification card;
- ▶ approximately 717 blank pink United States identification cards;
- ▶ an ink-based stamp, asking for the following information in English: name, address, city, social security number, date of birth, weight, height and eye color;
- ▶ approximately 879 two-inch-by-two-inch pieces of paper, with the above stamped information and in English and Spanish;
- ▶ one package of blank laminates, which were located on the camera counter; and
- ▶ a three-foot-by-two-foot display, entitled “Identificaciones Personales,” which means “Personal Identification.” Inserted and taped to the display are 12 identification cards, 10 of which purport to be government identification cards, such as a “United States of America Illinois Resident Identification” card with the State of Illinois seal in the background, and a “United States of America Identification” card with an identification number and expiration date. All 12 identification cards have passport-sized photos. All but three bear identification information such as social security number, date of birth, hair color, and eye color. Elias Munoz is pictured in at least two of the identification cards.

The complaint also alleges that on three consecutive days – April 3-5, 2007 – two undercover agents went to the Discount Mall and had photos taken at Foto Munoz by Munoz or another individual

who worked there in the course of purchasing and obtaining sets of counterfeit identification documents, including driver's licenses purporting to be issued by Michigan, Wisconsin, New York and Iowa, Resident Alien Cards (Green Cards) and Social Security Cards.

According to the complaint affidavit, a confidential informant (CI), told agents that he used Nuevo Foto Munoz since he began selling fraudulent identity documents in the Discount Mall parking lot for the alleged Leija-Sanchez Organization in 1996. As a "miquero" or vendor, the CI solicited customers to buy such fraudulent identification documents as Social Security Cards, Driver's Licenses, and Green Cards, or "micas." The CI and other miqueros would accompany customers into Nuevo Foto Munoz, where they obtained the customer's information and finished negotiating transactions.

The miqueros always obtained the blank order forms from Nuevo Foto Munoz, and the Organization required the miqueros to include the completed order form with every order submitted to the "office," where fraudulent identification documents were manufactured. Munoz allegedly kept a box of blank order forms, in English and Spanish, on a desk in the entryway of the shop. Sometimes the box was empty, and the CI asked Munoz to get more order forms, and he did. Once the order form was completed, the miquero told Munoz or another individual that the customer needed a photo for an ID. The miqueros told Munoz whether there needed to be a blue or white background for the photo – blue background for driver's licenses, and white background for green cards. Sometimes the miqueros simply told Munoz if the photo was for an ID (driver's license) or a mica (green card), and then Munoz would know whether to use a blue or white background. If the miquero did not specify what color background or what type of document, Munoz would ask if the photo was for an ID or mica.

The complaint alleges that each miquero was in Nuevo Foto Munoz taking orders for fraudulent identification documents about five or six times a day. Usually seven or eight miqueros worked at a time in two different shifts, and usually there were two or three miqueros at any one time taking orders in the photo shop

Munoz allegedly kept envelopes on the desk near the box of order forms, and the miquero put the completed order and photo in one of those envelopes. The miquero wrote his own nickname on the outside of the envelope and what type of document was being ordered. After a miquero put the completed order form and photo from Nuevo Foto Munoz in an envelope, the miquero hid all the envelopes in one spot. This way, a “runner” could pick up all the orders from the hiding spot whenever he was making a trip to the “office,” and, if a miquero was stopped by law enforcement, the miquero would not have any orders or money with him if he was searched. On busy days, runners brought about 20 orders each time they went to the office, and made about five or six trips to the office each day, the affidavit states.

The government is being represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Michelle Nasser Weiss, Andrew Porter and David Buvinger.

If convicted, conspiracy to produce fraudulent identification documents carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Note, however, that the Court would determine the appropriate sentence to be imposed.

The public is reminded that a complaint contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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